

A welcome respite for them

Amid closure of national zoo, animals find a rare moment of peace and calm

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

Something strange is happening inside the Bangladesh National Zoo in Dhaka. For the first time in decades, this establishment is devoid of huge throngs of people for an extended period of time as the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in never-before-seen social distancing measures.

With no people in sight, the animals seem to be having the time of their lives (however much is possible within the confines of a cage). The curator of the National Zoo, Dr Md Nurul Islam, seems to think the same.

"They seem to be feeling happier and are moving around more. Previously, many animals would be seen crouching or sitting in one corner of the cage. They are even eating with more relish, it seems," said Dr Islam, donned in a mask, gloves and a surgical cap.

The Daily Star went into the Bangladesh National Zoo premises during the lockdown to take a look at how the animals were doing in a zoo with no visitors. The pathways were empty -- this time there was no heavy scent of human smell or perfume; no sound of vuvuzelas, no child's screams could be heard, neither the clacking of shoes on the gravel path. Even though they were still stuck inside cages, it looked as though the animals got a moment to breathe -- without having to entertain humans, without being pelted with nuts and other food scraps.

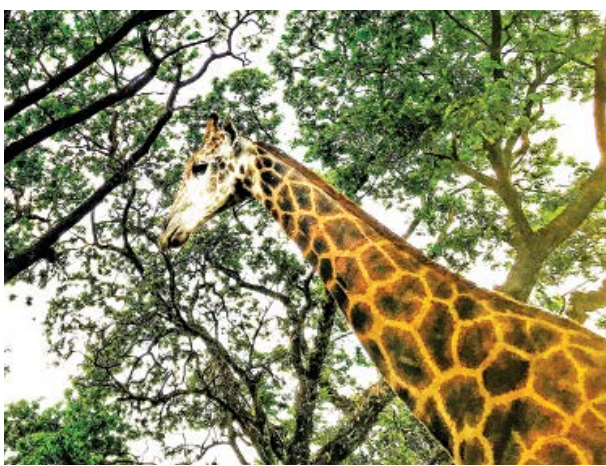
The deer moved in harmonious glory, within the little space they shared. They ate the watermelons given to them by one of the few caretakers who has been working at the premises during the shutdown.

Even the majestic tiger, which is often prodded and poked by visitors to move from its sedentary position, was seen walking on the little grass plot, napping and snoozing by the small waterbody, before retiring to its bed inside the cage.

Zoo authorities have made a roster to maintain the workforce needed to care for the animals. Every day, kilograms of meat, sugarcanes, apples, cucumbers and grains are prepped in the early hours for the zoo residents.

"There is a change in their eating habits as well. The

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A tiger lazes around beside a little pond, not a care in the world. As crowds are absent from the national zoo, animals are spending a happier time. Giraffes spend their time among the greeneries, while more and more birds are spotted in the zoo premises. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: ANANTA YUSUF, SARWAR RONY

Resume transport construction work

Ministry directs RHD, DMTCL

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Road Transport and Bridges ministry has directed Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and metro rail authority to resume work of all projects amid shutdown to maintain continuity.

It also asked authorities concerned to ensure all health-safety measures and social distancing, following the guidelines of Health Service Division.

Road Transport and Highway Division on Tuesday sent a letter in this regard to chief engineer of RHD and managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), which is implementing the country's first metro rail project.

The decision came at a time when the country is witnessing increasing numbers of Covid-19 deaths and infections. Most public and private offices were directed to remain closed from March 26 to May 16. Operation of public transport remains suspended to slow down spread of the outbreak.

However, the government allowed factories to resume operation from last week of April. Shopping malls, all types of shops and other businesses are going to reopen from Sunday on a limited scale ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

National technical advisory committee on Covid-19 has recommended reconsidering the government's decision of reopening, saying such a move could lead to further coronavirus transmission.

In the letter sent to RHD and DMTCL, the division said work of the projects should continue "for the sake of the country's development and considering reality on the ground".

RHD is implementing around 200 projects related to construction and maintenance of roads and bridges across the country. Of them, eight have been listed as mega projects.

On the other hand, DMTCL is responsible for building and maintaining the country's metro rail network in Dhaka and its adjacent areas. Physical work of MRTI-6, running from Uttara Third Phase to Motijheel, was ongoing.

Most physical work of all projects under RHD and DMTCL remained halted since March 26.

CHALLENGES TO RESUME WORK

An RHD engineer, who is involved with two major projects, said although the ministry has given the order, it will be difficult to restart work before Eid.

"It would take four to five days to bring workers at project sites, and we don't have many days before Eid. So, the work will resume after Eid," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday, wishing anonymity.

Besides, there is a concern about the supply channel of

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Star LIVE

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Fareast univ VC Nazmul Karim passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fareast International University (FIU) Vice Chancellor Prof Nazmul Karim

Chowdhury, who was tested Covid-19 positive, died yesterday at Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit, dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients.

The 70-year-old was shifted there three days ago from a private hospital after being diagnosed.

He breathed his last around 1am at the ICU, said Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin, director of DMCH.

Nazmul, from Lakshimpur, was a professor of Tourism and Hospitality Management of Dhaka University. After retirement, he joined FIU as its VC. An internationally recognised educationist, Prof Nazmul was also a writer, researcher, lawyer and an adviser.

University Grants Commission, Dhaka University and Fareast International University expressed grief at his death.

TACKLING COVID-19 FALLOUT

ADB approves another \$500m for Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday approved an additional \$500 million loan to strengthen Bangladesh government's efforts to manage the impact of coronavirus pandemic on the country's economy and public health.

"This package will build on ADB's ongoing collaboration with Bangladesh on structural reforms by supporting government efforts to speed up the country's social and economic recovery," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa.

"We will work closely with the government and development partners to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on the poor and most vulnerable, particularly those affected by job losses in small and medium enterprises and the informal sector," he said in a statement issued by ADB headquarters in Manila, Philippines.

The loan is expected to benefit over 15 million poor and vulnerable people in Bangladesh. Around 1.5 million workers, mostly women, in export-oriented industries will receive extended salary support while doctors, nurses, and medical workers fighting Covid-19 in government-run hospitals will receive special honorarium, the statement read.

The government's social protection programmes for senior citizens and women in distress will be expanded in the 100 poorest local government units in the country, it said.

At least 2 million poor families across the country will be given about \$23 each, while about 1 million poor and vulnerable families will receive food support every month during the pandemic emergency period. Affected industries and sectors, as well as micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises are also eligible for loans with subsidised interest, it added.

On April 30, ADB approved a \$100 million concessional loan to support the country's efforts to address the immediate public health requirements of combatting the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier, ADB also released a \$350,000 emergency grant for procurement of medical supplies and equipment and \$1.3 million from an existing project to provide one-time cash support to 22,619 trainees to enable them to continue their ongoing skills training programme, the statement added.

Prepare list of RMG workers

Health ministry directs all deputy commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health ministry yesterday directed all deputy commissioners to prepare and preserve a list of all RMG workers in their respective districts.

It also asked them to ensure home quarantine of garment workers, who would return from Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj. A letter, sent from the health services division of the ministry, also asked all civil surgeons to assist deputy commissioners in this regard.

The directives came at a time when number of garment factories resuming operations is on the rise after the government allowed limited operation of the country's top export-oriented sector in the last week of April.

Health experts say reopening the factories increases the risk of a wider transmission of Covid-19 outbreak.

Around 80 percent of the country's total garment factories are in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi. According to IEDCR, Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur are the worst affected districts.

"We have given the directives following advice of the national technical advisory committee on Covid-19," Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary (administration wing) of health services division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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AHSANULLAH MASTER MURDER CASE

16 years on, justice yet to be served

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Final justice is yet to be delivered to the family members of the then Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, who was brutally killed in 2004, as the appeals in connection with his murder case are still now pending with the apex court.

Yesterday was the 16th death anniversary of the lawmaker from Gazipur-2.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court is yet to start hearing on appeals filed against the High Court verdict in the case, although they were filed a few years ago.

The apex court did not begin it as defence counsels took deferment of the hearing at different times due to personal reasons. Additional Attorney General Montaz Uddin Fakir told The Daily Star yesterday. The appeals have been included in the cause list of the Appellate Division in January last year for hearing.

"We [state counsels] are ready for placing arguments. We will do it when the apex court starts the case proceedings," he said. All the relevant case documents have been submitted as well, he said, adding the SC may start hearing after it reopens.

Advocate Khandker Mahub Hossain, principal defence counsel of the case, couldn't be reached for comments despite repeated attempts over cellphone.

An Appellate Division bench headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain was set

to start hearing of the appeals on January 7 last year, as the matters were enlisted in its cause list. But the apex court bench on that day deferred hearing till March 4 last year, as all relevant documents required for the hearing were not produced before it. The appeals were later included in the cause list.

Assailants killed Ahsanullah Master, a freedom fighter, and Omar Faruq Ratan, a student, and wounded 17 others in a staccato burst of fire on a rally of Swachhchasebak League at Naogaon near the MP's house in Tongi on May 7, 2004.

The next day, his brother filed the case against 19 people, including Nurul Islam Sarkar, a Jubo Dal leader.

On April 16, 2005, a Dhaka court handed death sentences to 22 people and life terms to six others. A decade later, on June 15, 2016, the HC confirmed death penalty of six persons, including Nurul.

It, however, commuted capital punishment of seven others to life imprisonment, upheld life term of two and acquitted 11 of charges.

Currently, five petitions challenging the HC verdict are pending with the apex court, including those by Ahsanullah's brother Motiur Rahman, the government and convicts, attorney general office sources said.

The appeals sought death penalty of all convicts, while convicts sought acquittal from all conviction and sentences.

Coca-Cola pledges Tk 11.5cr in fight against Covid-19

CITY DESK

Coca-Cola in Bangladesh has pledged an initial support of Tk 11.5 crores towards helping the healthcare system and local communities through food package and distribution of beverages to combat the coronavirus crisis, said a press release.

The relief programme eventually aims at positively impacting over 50 lakh lives across the country. Coca-Cola Bangladesh is partnering with Care Bangladesh to implement this support initiative.

Sundeep Bajoria, VP of Coca-Cola South West Asia, said, "We are facing an unprecedented situation for humanity. Our approach to navigating the pandemic is grounded in our company's purpose, which ensures that we continuously strive to make a difference for people in the communities we serve around the world and Bangladesh as well."

Coca-Cola Bangladesh has adopted a purpose-driven approach to ensure immediate support to the country's healthcare infrastructure. The company will also support frontline workers including doctors, nurses, police and law enforcement personnel by catering to their hydration needs, said the press release.



With nothing else to do, two siblings entertain each other to pass the time while their mother watches on with a smile on her face. Sitting on a divider, they were waiting for food to be distributed at the capital's Elephant Road. Even during times of crisis, it seems there are little pockets of happiness here and there.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

GRAFT IN VGF RICE DISTRIBUTION

Fifty-two public representatives suspended so far

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Union Parishad chairman and two members were suspended yesterday due to their alleged involvement in irregularities in VGF rice distribution, said a press release issued by the LGRD ministry.

With the three, the total number of public representatives suspended for misappropriating relief materials stands at 52, said Mahmudul Hasan, public relations officer of the ministry.

The suspended trio were representatives of Kuchaiptoti UP of Gosairhat upazila under Shariatpur district.

They are: Chairman BM Nasir Uddin Swapan, member of Ward no-3 Mofazzal Bepari, and member of Ward no-9 Shamim Bepari.

Among the 52 suspended, there are 19 UP chairpersons, 31 UP members, one Zila Parishad member and a councillor of a municipality.

Along with the press release, the ministry has also issued a notification in this regard.

In the notice, the ministry asked the suspended public representatives to explain to deputy commissioners of their respective areas why they should not be permanently removed from their posts.